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Articles in Today's Clips

Thursday, September 25, 2008

(Be sure to maximize your screen to read your clips)

Subject	Page
Abuse-neglect	2
Child support*	3-6
Domestic violence	7-8
Food Assistance*	9
Foster care	10-11
Health care/Medicaid	12-14
Heating assistance	15-16
Poverty	17-21
News release*	22



Everything Michigan

Romulus woman headed to trial in shaken-baby death

9/24/2008, 2:48 p.m. EDT

The Associated Press

ROMULUS, Mich. (AP) — A Romulus woman is headed to trial on charges of shaking her boyfriend's 11-month-old daughter to death.

A Romulus district court judge on Wednesday ordered 27-year-old LaTonya Goodlow bound over to Wayne County circuit court for trial. She will be arraigned on Oct. 8.

Goodlow is charged with first-degree felony murder, involuntary manslaughter and first-degree child abuse. She faces life in prison if convicted on the murder charge.

Police say Goodlow violently shook Kalijah Arlboro. They say Goodlow told them the infant fell and hit her head.

Kalijah was pronounced brain dead on Aug. 14 and was disconnected from life support two days later.

A message seeking comment was left for defense attorney Susan Rock.

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September 25, 2008

Shneider: As feds tackle deficit, parents see new \$25 annual fee for child support

I really couldn't make this stuff up ...

Like about 240,000 other people in Michigan, Jana Corey of Lansing, a hard-working single mom who receives child-support for her 8-year-old daughter, got a letter recently from the state Department of Human Services.

At the top of the page, in bold letters, tucked into the kind of box favored by scam-letter designers, were these words: "NOTICE: New Federal Law Requires \$25 Yearly Fee."

The letter began this way:

"The Office of Child Support records show that you are the custodial party (the payee) on a child support case. Beginning September 2008, Michigan will start collecting a \$25 yearly fee ..."

'Deficit reduction'

But it's no scam - at least not in the conventional sense.

It is, said Marilyn Stephen, director of the Office of Child Support, part of the federal Deficit Reduction Act of 2005.

Even on the phone, I got the impression Stephen was struggling to keep a straight face. Especially in light of the \$700 billion juvenile- delinquent support - no fees required - on its way to Wall Street.

Stephen said about 240,000 custodial parents in Michigan will pay the fee (non-custodial parents already pay fees of \$3.50 per month).

Theoretically, the feds get 66 percent of the money, while the state retains 34 percent. However, the feds got their share up front. The state's cut so far is a meager \$150,000.

Stephen said her office received fewer complaints than she expected.

"We put on 10 extra people to accept the calls," she said, "but there was not a huge amount of push-back. There was not as big an outcry from customers as we expected."

Fighting words

But Jana Corey, an adjuster for a local insurance company, is not among the complacent:

"This is not right, and I will not stand for it," she wrote in a letter to Ingham County Friend of the Court.

Three more paragraphs from Corey's letter:

"You do understand that when I file my taxes each year, I have to claim my child support as income, and get taxed on that ...

"You do understand that ... you are taking this \$25 away from my daughter ...

"Why does the government help people who are not willing to help themselves, and make the people who are actually trying to make something for themselves - people who actually have jobs - suffer?"

Corey was referring to the fact that people who receive assistance from the state - food stamps, etc. - are exempt from the fee.

The rationale for that, Stephen said, is that people receiving assistance are at, or near, the poverty line.

Also, the fee applies only to people receiving at least \$500 in child support.

You may learn more about the fee at www.michigan.gov/childsupport.

Call John Schneider at 377-1175, send a fax to 377-1298 or e-mail jschneid@lsj.com.

Nonsupport crackdown pays off

BY LISA ROOSE-CHURCH • AND ALISON BERGSIEKER • SEPTEMBER 24, 2008

A recently completed six-week Friend of the Court warrant sweep turned up 40 people representing about \$100,000 in unpaid child support.

In all, 34 people were arrested and an additional six turned themselves in and paid their arrearages during a sweep that was conducted on six Wednesdays in August and September.

Those 40 people represent a combined total of an estimated \$100,000 in unpaid child support affecting about 50 children. The average age of those arrested was 27, and of the 34 arrested, six were women.

An estimated \$27,000 in unpaid child support was collected throughout the sweep.

Friend of the Court Melissa Scharrer said she hopes to conduct four sweeps during the next fiscal year, which begins in October.

"A child has two parents," she said. "Both have the obligation to support their children. It's an obligation and a privilege to do that for your children."

Larry Bohnsack, Friend of the Court investigator, said the arrests mostly occurred in Livingston County. However, some reached as far as West Branch in Ogemaw County, as well as Newaygo in Newaygo County, and Flint.

Scharrer said the sweep targeted parents at least \$5,000 behind in child support payments and who failed to appear for a hearing to explain why they were behind.

Scharrer said her office is willing to work with parents who fall behind on child support. In one instance, she said, a man paid \$500 of his arrearage directly to the mother of his children, who desperately needed the money for basic living expenses. In exchange, the woman "forgave" that portion of the man's debt.

Traditionally, the fee is paid to FOC and then paid to the custodial parent, which can take some time.

Assisting in recent sweeps were Michigan State Police Troopers D.J. Oswald-DeBottis and Greg Galarneau, as well as Livingston County Sheriff's Department Deputies Bob Smith and Kirk Gunning.

"People in the state of Michigan are paying for these people's children," Gunning said when asked why such sweeps are important. "When you have kids, it's your duty to raise your children; it's not the duty of the state."

On one stop Sept. 17, a trooper wondered if the male subject sought was really home because he saw a water bottle on a kitchen table, but on a return visit only seconds later, the water bottle had been moved to a coffee table. No one answered the door, however, when the trooper knocked.

Oswald-DeBottis said officers could not enter that individual's home because they were there on a misdemeanor warrant, not a felony pickup.

An FOC warrant sweep in October resulted in five arrests and four people turning themselves in. Those nine people represented a combined total of more than \$131,000 in unpaid child support affecting 13 children.

Parents who need help in a child support case are encouraged to call the Livingston County Friend of the Court at (517) 546-0230.

Contact Daily Press & Argus reporter Lisa Roose-Church at (517) 552-2846 or at lrchurch@gannett.com.

Contact Daily Press & Argus reporter Alison Bergsieker at (517) 552-2857 or at abergsieker@gannett.com.



KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Wednesday, September 24, 2008

Kalamazoo

BY REX HALL JR.

rhall@kalamazoogazette.com

388-7784

Man charged with domestic violence

BLOOMINGDALE -- A 48-year-old man suspected of assaulting his wife and kicking his 18-month-old daughter in the face was arraigned Tuesday in Van Buren County District Court, police said.

Mark William Russell, of Bloomingdale, is charged with felony child abuse, interfering with electronic communications and a misdemeanor count of domestic violence. He was being held at the county jail Tuesday, according to the Van Buren County Sheriff's Office.

Police said Russell's wife told sheriff's deputies she had locked her husband out of their house in the 46000 block of 48th Avenue at about 2 p.m. Monday and was on the phone with police when he kicked a window, striking their 18-month-old daughter in the face with his foot and broken glass. The woman told police Russell then assaulted her and took away the phone.

The child was treated for non-life-threatening injuries, while Russell's wife suffered minor injuries and refused medical attention, authorities said. Russell told deputies he had been under the influence of oxycodone, sold under the brand name OxyContin, according to the sheriff's office.

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Abuse survivors to speak

Posted by [wawood](#) September 25, 2008 07:47AM

Five female survivors of domestic violence, several of whom are well-known in Jackson, will tell their stories at a Phenomenal Woman dinner sponsored by AWARE Inc.

At a glance

• **What:** Phenomenal Woman dinner

• **Where:** Arbor Hills Golf Club, 1426 Arbor Hills Road

• **When:** 5 to 7:30 p.m. Oct. 15. Reservations for the free dinner are due by Oct. 6. Call Kathryn Williams, 783-1638, ext. 36.

• **Details:** It includes door prizes and a silent auction. Anyone wishing to donate to either should call Williams.

"You never know if your female co-worker, the woman sitting near you in church or standing in line at the grocery store has been or is in a domestic-abuse situation," said Kathryn Williams, a transitional-housing program coordinator for AWARE, which provides shelter and counseling for women involved in domestic or sexual violence.

Becky Filip, executive director of AWARE, said the agency typically offers training to police officers and court officials in October, which marks Domestic Violence month. This time, they decided to let the survivors speak for themselves.

"Actually, we had to cut off the number of women speaking that evening," said Filip.

Filip and Williams said they are impressed there are so many women willing to share what they have endured.

The idea for the dinner is credited to Williams, who creates monthly "empowerment" programs for women in the shelter or who live in the 22 apartments owned by AWARE. Women and their children can live in the transitional housing for up to two years so they can get back on their feet.

"Kathryn has blown that program wide open," said Filip, referring to the number and quality of the programs.

"When she suggested this program about survivors talking, I knew it had to be at a special event," she said.

Williams explained that survivors "don't often get the opportunity to give their story."

"We want people to leave being more knowledgeable about domestic violence. Anyone can be a victim and it's not the victim's fault. And maybe women sitting in the audience who are in an abusive situation will help themselves. We have free counseling here," said Williams.

The title of the evening — Phenomenal Woman — is taken from the title of a Maya Angelou poem.

They expect 200 people. "Notable" Jackson community members will serve dinner, which will be catered by White's Catering. Hinkley Bakery is supplying dessert.

The Jackson Area Career Center is printing the programs, and several businesses and individuals are donating items to the silent auction, including Gold Crown Jewelers; Ron Worsham, a local artist; J.C. Penney Salon; and Michael Groetsch, an author who is donating several books.

Categories: [Top Stories](#)

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Footer

No more Food Stamps

Bridge card now in place of food stamps

Tuesday, September 23, 2008 at 5:27 p.m.

TV-6 Upper Michigan's Source

MARQUETTE -- A faltering economy is one reason more Marquette County residents are relying on government help to make ends meet.

According to the Department of Human Services, the number of people getting food assistance has risen by over a thousand cases since early 2005.

Clients now use a bridge card that gets swiped at the grocery store instead of food stamps. It's a system intended to eliminate misuse by preventing non-food items from being purchased.

"The program is simply to supplement food purchases; for example, clients cannot purchase paper products or cleaning products, pet foods, alcohol or tobacco products with the bridge cards," said Rich Miketinac at the Department of Human Services.

The maximum food assistance for a single person breaks down to about five dollars a day.

To find out if you're eligible for help, contact the Department of Human Services in your area.

One out of every five people in Michigan receives some type of public assistance



September 24, 2008

Senate OKs foster care reform; Bush to get bill

BY ROBIN ERB
FREE PRESS EDUCATION WRITER

Michigan's foster children may get three more years of help from the federal government -- to age 21 -- and aunts, uncles, grandparents and other relative caregivers may be in line, too, for some financial aid.

Federal legislation passed by the Senate on Monday and by the House earlier would reshape federal funding of child welfare, help states cover staggering costs of caring for children in foster care and move children to permanent homes quicker, advocates said.

President George W. Bush still must sign the measure.

"It's a huge day for us," said Bill Frenzel, a former congressman who co-chaired the Pew Commission, a group that lobbied to change foster care. The commission's goal is to put foster children in permanent families.

Congress, Frenzel said, "didn't do everything we asked them to do, but ... we feel awfully good."

As it stands now, Michigan and many states generally end foster care at 18 -- an age when youths are too young to be cut loose from the system, said Jack Kresnak, a former Free Press reporter and now president of Michigan's Children, an advocacy group.

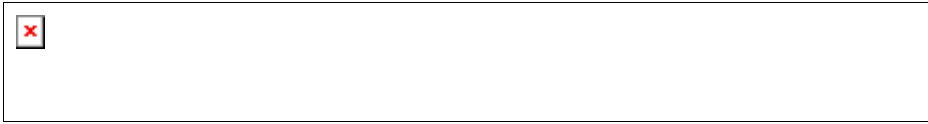
He said the measures are "a great help" to the state's foster care children and to those who provide for them -- often with little or no financial assistance. Many relatives care for children who would otherwise be in foster care, and they receive little, if any, financial help.

They would be eligible for federal funds if they choose to become legal guardians to those youths. That would move the children closer to permanency and remove cases from the state's foster care caseload, lowering state administrative costs.

The measure also improves adoption incentives and makes it easier for American Indians to receive child welfare funds.

The cost savings by moving foster care children toward permanent families will help offset costs, backers have said.

Contact **ROBIN ERB** at 313-222-2708 or rerb@freepress.com.



09/25/2008

Landmark Adoption Bill Passed By House

By Susan Brinkmann, For The Bulletin

Groundbreaking legislation, marking the most sweeping congressional reform of the U.S. foster care system in more than a decade, has passed the House of Representatives and is on its way to the Senate where it is expected to pass.

The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act (H.R. 6893) is designed to help thousands of children in foster care by promoting permanent families for them through relative guardianship and adoption.

Among its many provisions is the establishment of "Family Connection Grants," which will help families facilitate the adoption of foster children with blood relatives such as grandparents or aunts and uncles.

The new legislation also doubles the amount of money states would receive for promoting and completing certain adoptions. For instance, any state that increases the number of adoptions of special-needs children to a record high level would receive \$4,000 per adoption, up from \$2,000 currently. The same process would occur for states boosting the number of adoptions of children above the age of nine.

Under the new law, for the first time, tribal governments will be able to receive foster care funds directly from the government, thus ensuring that more American Indian and Alaskan Native children can remain in their own communities.

The legislation also allows states to continue providing support up to the age of 21 for young people in foster care who are pursuing education, training or work. It also improves oversight of the educational progress and health care needs of children in foster care.

"Congress should be commended for coming together to pass this important bipartisan legislation, which will positively impact the lives and futures of the more than half a million children and youth currently in foster care," said Rebecca Rimel, president and chief executive officer of The Pew Charitable Trusts.

"We also want to recognize the tremendous work of the members of The Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care, the Kids are Waiting campaign, and the many others who have helped to make this national effort a success."

The Pew Commission, a national, nonpartisan panel established by The Pew Charitable Trusts, undertook a year-long comprehensive assessment of the nation's foster care system and developed practical child-centered solutions to improve outcomes for foster care.

"The need for all children to have safe, permanent families to love, nurture, protect, and guide them was a steady compass throughout our commission's deliberations," said the Honorable Maura Corrigan, Michigan State Supreme Court Justice and a Member of the Pew Commission. "State courts see tens of thousands of foster care cases a year. This legislation provides important new policy that will help judges and other professionals ensure that more abused and neglected children can leave foster care to join safe, loving homes."

Douglas Johnson, spokesman for the National Right to Life Committee, applauds the new bill and believes it will encourage many to make the decision for life rather than abortion.

The bill is good, he said, because it "makes adoption a more viable option and certainly will result in some children being given the gift of life who otherwise would meet their end through abortion."

Sue Brinkmann is a regular contributor to The Bulletin and can be reached at fiat723@aol.com.

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Jackson dentist addresses Congress about Medicaid

Posted by [mlammi](#) September 25, 2008 08:29AM

With millions of low-income children battling oral disease, the nation's leaders must work to improve access to dental care, the dental director for Jackson's Center for Family Health told members of Congress this week.

Dr. Jane Grover, who also serves as first vice president of the American Dental Association, stressed the importance of making pediatric dental care more accessible to children and families with Medicaid during her five-minute testimony in Washington, D.C.



Jackson Citizen PatriotDr. Jane Grover

She was joined by seven other health officials before the U.S. House Domestic Policy Subcommittee's Committee on Oversight and Government Reform.

"We have children that aren't being seen," Grover said Wednesday in a telephone interview, the day after her testimony. "We have too many children walking around with untreated dental disease and that's only part of it."

Grover said more dentists need to participate in the system and there should be greater focus on boosting awareness of oral health and programs that are available to low-income families.

"They have a great opportunity to improve the dental portion of the Medicaid system," Grover said.

About 6.5 million children using Medicaid had untreated tooth decay in 2005, according to a recently released federal report. Children with Medicaid were almost twice as likely to have untreated tooth decay than children with private health insurance, the report found.

The severity of the problem was realized after a 12-year-old Maryland boy died in February 2007 when an untreated infected tooth led to a brain infection. The boy's family, which used Medicaid, was unable to find a dentist to treat him, according to the report.

Michigan is already working to give Medicaid-eligible children better access to dental care through Healthy Kids Dental, Grover said. The state Department of Community Health and Delta Dental Plan of Michigan partnered to start the program in 2000. More than 60 counties participate, but Jackson County does not.

Grover said facing 15 members of Congress for the first time to discuss oral health reform was both a little daunting and thrilling.

But she said she came away from the meeting with greater admiration for the nation's legislative leaders.

"It was a great experience," Grover said. "I feel that our legislators have a great understanding and a better understanding than many of us anticipate on dental issues and Medicaid."

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Footer

Published: September 24, 2008 6:00 a.m.

Rise in health costs outpacing earnings

7.3 times faster in Indiana; 4th worst rate in nation

Michael Schroeder | The Journal Gazette

Health care premiums for Indiana families rose an estimated 7.3 times faster than earnings from 2000 to 2007, according to a report released Tuesday.

The report by consumer health group Families USA shows Hoosiers have one of the worst premiums-to-earnings increase ratios in the country. Only three states – Michigan, Ohio and Connecticut – fared worse, according to the report. The findings are based on data from various government sources including the Department of Health and Human Services, the Census Bureau and the Department of Labor.

Health care premiums for family coverage provided through the workplace in Indiana rose by 83.4 percent during the period studied, from \$6,628 to \$12,153 per worker (including employer and worker shares). Median earnings rose by just 11.4 percent during the same period, from \$24,531 to \$27,330.

The findings show “Hoosiers we’re being squeezed on both ends,” said Ron Pollack, executive director for Families USA.

Indiana families are spending more of their budgets on health care, he said – a reality that holds true across the U.S. Premium increases have actually slowed somewhat in recent years, but they still easily outstrip increases in earnings, inflation and company profits, Pollack said.

He said the troubling trend could put more Hoosiers at risk for becoming uninsured or underinsured. Already people are paying more for less, as plan deductibles and out-of-pocket costs increase and coverage recedes, Pollack said.

In addition, the premium share workers pay has grown faster than their employer's share, though employers still bear most of the cost.

In 2000, employers paid an estimated \$5,309 per worker for family coverage in Indiana; that increased by 75.3 percent to \$9,309 in 2007. By comparison, the portion workers paid increased 115.6 percent, from \$1,319 to \$2,844.

As private insurance coverage has declined in Indiana, David Roos, executive director of Covering Kids and Families of Indiana, says publicly funded insurance, such as Medicaid, has played an increasing role.

As of August, 870,000 Hoosiers had publicly funded coverage, up from 790,000 in January 2006. Roos attributed the increase to public outreach and a downturn in the economy.

He said more needs to be done to address the disparity in earnings and health care premiums increases, including addressing premium costs and underlying economic problems. The Midwest has been hard hit because of its reliance on manufacturing and the troubles in the automobile sector, Pollack of Families USA said.

Michigan – which had the worst premiums-to-earnings increase ratio of any state – saw premiums increase an estimated 17.1 times faster than earnings from 2000 to 2007. Ohio had the second worst ratio, with premiums rising 8.5 times faster than earnings, compared with the national average of 5.4 times faster.

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Article published July 11, 2008

Michigan utilities shutoffs up sharply

Trend likely in Ohio as moratorium ends

By **LARRY P. VELLEQUETTE**
BLADE BUSINESS WRITER

Electric and gas utilities in southeast Michigan have reported sharp increases in the number of service shutoffs for nonpayment, a national trend that Ohio utilities say will migrate into the Buckeye state as the effects of a voluntary winter moratorium melt away.

The number of shutoffs in southeastern Michigan climbed dramatically in May - the latest month for which figures are available - compared to May 2007, according to the Michigan Public Service Commission.

Michigan Gas Utilities disconnected service to 880 customers in May, up from none a year earlier, a spokesman said.

The same month, Consumers Energy shut off 7,215 electricity customers' service for nonpayment, up from 1,407 a year earlier, and DTE Energy shut off service to 6,545 from 3,091.

Electric and gas utilities nationwide are reporting sharp increases in the number of customers losing their service because of delinquent bills.

A survey by the National Energy Assistance Directors Association in June found that 8 percent of households with incomes between \$33,000 and \$55,500 annually were disconnected from electricity service.

Delinquent utility customers in Ohio benefitted from a voluntary five-month moratorium requested by the governor last winter after four people died in a home in West Toledo that had been disconnected that day by Toledo Edison. But shutoff notices from those overdue winter bills are starting to arrive now.

Through May, Columbia Gas of Ohio had reported disconnections of 34,277 customers, up from 33,484 for the five months a year earlier. But spokesman Chris Kozak said that, through June, disconnection notices have climbed 9 percent for the year from the first half of 2007.

"It's tough to know why someone doesn't pay their bills. Shutoffs are always a last resort," Mr. Kozak said.

"Let us know you're in a position that you're having trouble paying your bills; we can work with you."

Similarly, shutoff notices in the Toledo Edison service area were down sharply through May, with 788 this year compared with 1,921 last year. But the number is expected to rise this summer.

"Customers that are having trouble paying their bills have to call us and let us know what's going on, so that we can point them to places where help is available," said spokesman Mark Durbin.

Mark Wolfe, executive director of the National Energy Assistance Directors Association, said high gasoline prices

are a main culprit behind increasing shutoff notices.

"In a lot of cases you could be spending an extra \$100 a month for gasoline," he said. "For families that live from paycheck to paycheck, they just don't have any other resources available."

Contact Larry P. Vellequette at:
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September 25, 2008

Crop walk a hit despite rainy weather

By Nathan Mueller
STAFF WRITER

The aftereffects of Hurricane Ike lingered over southeast Michigan last weekend, but no amount of rain was going to stop a group of dedicated people walking for a cause.

About 60-to-70 people dodged raindrops last Sunday to take part in the ninth annual CROP Walk, which raises money and awareness about local and global poverty. The event raises money for Active Faith (25 percent) and more than 30 global relief agencies worldwide (75 percent).

"It went amazingly well considering the forecast was abysmal," said event coordinator Mary Jo Hartman. "Had mother nature cooperated it would have been even bigger."

The CROP Walk, which stands for Communities Responding to Overcome Poverty, is a 2.5 km walk that began and ended at Active Faith. Some walkers did the route twice because, technically, in most third world countries people have to walk about 5 km to get fresh drinking water, Hartman said.

People who were at the tail end of the 2.5 km walk got a little wet, while those who walked the route twice got soaked.

In the end, however, it was worth it, Hartman said.

The event also featured music and clowns, and the Knights of Columbus and the South Lyon Area Kiwanis donated food, beverages and time to help make the event a success.

Hartman said the total amount raised from the walk will not be known until the end of the month, but she thinks it will be close to the goal of \$10,000.

Active Faith Director Maryann Mihalic said the money will be a big help to the organization.

"The event went very well and we had a great turnout," she said.

This also was the first time the CROP Walk was held in the fall to not conflict with Relay for Life.

For more information or to donate to the cause, contact Hartman at (248) 446-8729.

Contact staff writer Nathan Mueller (248) 437-2011 or at nmueller@gannett.com.



September 25, 2008

Include working families in the recovery effort

BY GOV. JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM

Last week, even though I was 13 time zones away working to bring jobs and investment from Japan to Michigan, the pace of economic news back home was dizzying. By week's end, Washington was looking for solutions that would prevent the crisis from spiraling out of control.

While there may be no alternative to strong federal action to stem the red ink on Wall Street, here in Michigan and in other states suffering through hard times, the Bush administration's willingness to lend a hand to some of the most powerful companies in the nation begs an important question: What about Main Street?

Without a recognition that real economic recovery must address the needs of working families who suffer the brunt of this crisis, there can be no true recovery.

Governors from across the country and from both parties are now asking those questions and calling on Congress and the Bush administration to work with us to ensure that working families have the kind of help they need most in these tough economic times: new job opportunities, affordable health care, lower energy bills and, yes, for some, the knowledge that an unemployment check will still be there while they land new work.

Last week, I joined 26 other governors in urging Congress to pass an economic recovery package aimed at Main Street, not just Wall Street. Our request is simple: Help us help the working families who make our states strong.

That means investing in road, bridge and other necessary projects to improve our crumbling infrastructures and, at the same time, immediately create jobs. It means providing states more resources to expand and protect health care for seniors and children. It means helping to ensure that people can keep the heat on this winter. And in Michigan and other auto manufacturing states, it means ensuring that the automobile industry -- on which hundreds of thousands of families rely both directly and indirectly for their livelihood -- can retool to build new, fuel-efficient vehicles and keep those jobs in America.

In Michigan, there are more than 70 road and bridge projects that could put people to work if only we had the federal funding to actually start the projects. Hundreds of thousand of people could be protected from losing the unemployment benefits that are helping to keep dinner on their family's table.

Every month, 7,500 more people seek help getting health care. Already, nearly 30,000 more families have asked for help paying their upcoming winter heating bills. As the economic crunch squeezes families tighter, more will undoubtedly be wondering how to pay the bills.

In the long term, bailing out Wall Street today could help to protect the savings those families have worked so hard to build, but it does nothing to help their pocketbooks today. The economic recovery package governors are pushing will.

I'm so pleased that our congressional leadership is pushing this kind of recovery-for-all package, but it seems not everyone in Washington agrees. They should.

While Michigan has long felt the impact of national economic policies that just aren't working for real people, the rest of the country is, unfortunately, now feeling our pain. Unemployment is up across the nation. Foreclosures are spiking. Families in record numbers are visiting their local food banks.

Michigan is unique in that so much of our job loss has come as a result of unenforced trade policies that shipped our jobs overseas by the thousands. But the Bush administration's policies have been painful for Michigan -- and for other states -- in other ways, too.

Their refusal to expand health care to children forced states to find other ways to protect the most vulnerable. Their refusal to expand affordable health care to more citizens in this state means that Michiganians have to wait for a new administration for relief. The slashing of funding for community policing means that states and local communities have had to take police officers and first responders off the streets and trim prevention programs aimed at teens.

This week, however, could be an opportunity to prove that while members of Congress clearly are working to help the critical structures of our financial markets, they are also listening to the voices of working families across the country.

JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM is governor of Michigan. Write to her in care of the Free Press Editorial Page, 615 W. Lafayette, Detroit, MI 48226 or at oped@freepress.com.



September 25, 2008

1 in 4 Michigan voters: U.S. in depression

They're split on Wall Street bailout

BY JEWEL GOPWANI
FREE PRESS BUSINESS WRITER

As Congress wrangles over an expensive Wall Street bailout, 76% of likely Michigan voters say the U.S. economy already is in either a recession or a depression -- including one in four who say the nation is in a depression.

Michigan voters are evenly split on whether the government should bail out the nation's troubled financial institutions, the Detroit Free Press-Local 4 Michigan Poll shows.

The poll was based on interviews Monday and Tuesday with 424 likely voters in the Nov. 4 election and has a margin of error of plus or minus 4.8 percentage points.

The results reflect the drumbeat of bad economic news in the state. In August, Michigan held onto the highest unemployment rate in the nation. Automakers and their suppliers continue to lay off workers and offer buyouts and retirement incentives. Meanwhile, volatile stock markets and oil prices are making consumers nervous about spending.

"Everything says we're in a recession," said Rob Knight, 21, of Hartford, near Kalamazoo, a respondent in the poll. Knight, his wife and 11-month-old son live with his parents and share the costs of home ownership.

"We've been pooling our incomes to pay our bills," Knight said. He and his wife are security guards at the Palisades Nuclear Plant.

More than half of those surveyed said the U.S. economy is in a recession.

Some think it's worse. Twenty-four percent said they think the U.S. economy is in a depression.

Linda Gilbert, 65, of Clinton Township said what she sees hints at how her parents described life during the Great Depression of the 1930s.

"People really are afraid to spend money. I remember them telling me they were afraid to go and make any kind of big purchases, and I think that's what's happening a lot right now," said Gilbert, who said she sees homes for sale or foreclosed all across Clinton Township, as well as people trying to sell their vehicles.

"One would think it's just Michigan" that thinks it's in a depression, said pollster Ann Selzer of Des Moines, Iowa. Her company, Selzer & Co. Inc., conducted the poll. "You know what? Everyone is hurting."

A USA Today/Gallup poll taken early last week, as the financial crisis became full blown, showed that 23% of adults nationwide say the country is in a depression. Another 38% in that poll said the nation was in recession.

While it might feel like the economy is in a depression, it's not close, said Charles Ballard, economics professor at Michigan State University.

"Right now we're nowhere near the kinds of economic catastrophe that would cause one to have

called the downturn of the 1930s a depression," he said.

At the time, unemployment was about 25%. Nationally, in August, unemployment was 6.1%; Michigan was at 8.9%.

The Free Press poll shows that more women than men think the economy is in trouble. Among men, 70% say the economy is in a recession or depression, compared with 81% of women.

"They're on the front lines of what things cost and may have more of their pocketbook in the game," Selzer said.

Meanwhile, 53% of Michigan voters said they are worse off financially than they were four years ago, and 58% say they expect to be better off four years from now.

Michigan voters are split on whether the government should help the nation's financial institutions, on the heels of the bankruptcy of investment bank Lehman Brothers.

Of those surveyed, 43% said the government needs to step in, while 45% said a bailout would only encourage the greed and risk-taking that led to the financial meltdown.

Suzan Bandyk, 56, of Milford said she sees both sides.

"The bailout is not a good thing," said Bandyk, an interior designer. But allowing the economy to get worse would not work either, she said.

Knight disagrees with the proposed bailout.

"I don't think that the taxpayers should bail out companies that did nothing for the taxpayer when they were losing their house," he said. "Why should we, as Americans, take care of a company that didn't take care of us?"

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Michigan Department of Human Services News Release

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Federal legislation offers more options for Michigan's foster youths

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Michigan's child welfare system will have more resources to provide support for foster children and the families that care for them under federal legislation that Gov. Jennifer M. Granholm supported and Congress approved this week.

Granholm, who chairs the National Governors' Association Health and Human Services Committee, wrote Congressional leaders in early September expressing support for the Fostering Connection to Success and Increasing Adoption Act, a two-bill package that promotes significant changes to state child welfare programs.

"As Michigan continues its aggressive plan to reform the child welfare system, this gives us important tools that will help children," said Ismael Ahmed, director of the Michigan Department of Human Services. "We urge the president to sign these bills so that we can more quickly move children into safe, permanent homes and provide them and their families with the resources they need."

The bills contain the following improvements that provide greater opportunities for later success:

- Extending and increasing incentives for adoption, including those that promote adoption of children with special needs and older foster youths.
- Making federal assistance available so states can offer guardianship payments to grandparents and other relative guardians of foster youths who want to permanently care for them.
- Making it easier for immediate relatives to step in and raise children when their parents cannot by requiring notification of relatives when children are removed from their parents and offering grants to link caregivers with the services their children need.
- Helping older youths in foster care transition to adult life by allowing them to continue to receive federal foster care payments beyond the age of 18.
- Making federal matching grants to state, local, or tribal child welfare agencies and experienced private nonprofit organizations to help children in or at risk of entering, foster care to reconnect with family members.
- Improving educational opportunities for foster children and youths.

Specifically, Michigan has the option of allowing foster youths to remain in care until the age of 21 and to extend Medicaid until age 22. Access to affordable housing, education, healthcare and even establishing credit are challenges frequently cited by older foster youths leaving care at 18 or 19 years of age.

"This is a great start," said Shawn Semelsberger, 22, a former foster youth from Traverse City. "A lot more needs to be done and it's going to be an ongoing process. Foster youths simply don't have a network of caring adults to help them as they become adults themselves."

Semelsberger works with a network of youth boards across Michigan. She helped author Voice 2: Discussing Issues and Concerns of Michigan's Foster Youth and develop the Foster Youth in Transition Web site, www.michigan.gov/fyit